

TO: Superintendent of Schools

FROM: John Bynoe
Associate Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Education

Alfred DeMaria, MD
Assistant Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

DATE: March 14, 2003

SUBJECT: Smallpox preparedness and Response

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is implementing the Commonwealth's smallpox pre-event preparedness program. The program includes training and vaccinating volunteers in hospital and community settings to respond safely and appropriately in the event of an intentional release of smallpox virus. School nurses, along with their colleagues in public health and emergency response, have an important role in this process.

MDPH has sent information on the disease, smallpox vaccination, and available resources to every school nurse in the Commonwealth. The goal is to ensure that school nurses are prepared to respond to questions about smallpox and facilitate recognition and timely reporting of adverse reactions in persons receiving the vaccine, or their contacts. They have also received information to help them evaluate children with febrile rash illness.

In addition, school nurses have expressed a willingness to volunteer to be trained and vaccinated against smallpox, preparing them to be part of the response should a smallpox event occur. This response would include rapid implementation of mass vaccination clinics across the Commonwealth. School nurses will play an essential role in these activities and the support of school superintendents and principals is critical to their involvement in emergency preparedness and response.

Thank you for support in this important biodefense initiative. If you have further questions, please call Donna Lazorik, MS, RN, at MDPH at 617-983-6800.

Cc: School Nurse Leader